10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

(K.) *Health.*—Taken as a whole, the people may be said to be a healthy one. Serious diseases, apart from accidents incident to their callings, are but few in number; and the general physique of the people speaks to a healthy active life.

Consanguineous Unions.—A large proportion of the marriages come under this heading, including not only those of persons within the prohibited degrees, for which dispensations are obtained, but also those which take place between people who are related in some recognisable but hardly nameable degree. Cases of the first class, or those which require dispensations, are of frequent occurrence, but seldom or never take place between persons nearer of kin than third cousins. The other cases, of course, are the most common of all, as from the size of the population and its isolated position, every family must, after a few generations, become more or less related to every other. Marriages with strangers, though more numerous of late years, are not common. The uniformity of strain does not appear to have produced any effect except the great similarity of appearance already noticed (p. 322); no cases of malformation or congenital disease are ascribed to it.

Diseases.—For most of the following facts I am indebted to the kindness of Dr. P. J. Hart, the medical officer of the islands, who, besides affording me much valuable information relative to the people and their ailments, the result of his long experience of them, kindly allowed me to look over his notes of cases. The main diseases may be classed as follows:—

Insanity.—There is at present no case of this among the natives of the islands, nor has there been one since 1888 when a case which, however, was not of long duration, occurred in Inishshark.

Idiocy and Imbecility.—Properly speaking there is no idiocy; but there are two cases in which the persons, though shrewd and sharp enough about most of their own affairs, yet show signs of mental want in a sufficient degree to amount to slight imbecility.

Epilepsy is not common, but two cases are known in one of which the patient is subject to delusions, and always states, after a fit, that he has been with the fairies on the mainland. Of the other no information could be obtained except that the patient had had "fits."

Deaf-mutism has not been known for years on either island, but a case of temporary dumbness occurred on Inishshark in 1892.

Blindness is equally rare, there being but one case, a man over sixty years of age who acquired it late in life.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
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Malformations are scarce, but as mentioned before (p. 323), arrest of growth of the pinna of the left ear was observed in one instance; and a boy with talipes equino-varus was seen near Westquarter; but his condition was said not to be congenital, but acquired as the result of an accident. 164 732

Hernia have been of pretty frequent occurrence of late years, Dr. Hart having seen six cases since 1888, before which date he had no record of having observed any cases of it. Of these six, four were of inguinal hernia, three on the right side, and one on the left, one was a left femoral, and one, in a female child, umbilical. The sudden occurrence of so many cases in succession would seem to indicate some cause of recent origin; what this may be it is difficult to see, but it is ascribed by some to the new style of work required for the building of the fish-curing station, piers, and other relief work, requiring the lifting of heavy weights. 164 [464] [483]

Fevers.—Measles and scarlet fever have not been seen for some time. Some years ago there was an outbreak of enteric fever in Middlequarter, when a large proportion of the population of the hamlet were attacked by it, and there were several deaths.

"Constitutional" diseases.—Phthisis, though not common, is sometimes met with; and strumous affections, abscesses, &c., are not unfrequently seen, though not very numerous on the whole. The only wonder is that these affections are not more common, as the sanitary state of the houses is not by any means good; and it must be mainly due to their open-air life that they do not suffer more. Malignant disease is said to be unknown. Rheumatism, especially in the form of lumbago, is a very common complaint, but the acute form is rare. [364]

Dietetic Diseases.—These, with rheumatism and bronchitis, form the great majority of all the affections met with; the large extent to which fish and potatoes enter into their dietary may have something to do with this, but there can be no doubt that the use, or abuse, of tea must bear a certain amount of the blame. The most common forms of complaint are flatulence and constipation. As might be expected from the fact of fish forming a large part of the every-day food of the people, ento-parasites are among the most common of all troubles, about every tenth case applying for treatment being due to them. *Ascaris lumbricoides* is the worm most frequently found. 164 262

Respiratory Diseases.—Phthisis has been before alluded to; bronchitis and pneumonia are not uncommon in the winter months. 164

Local affections are but few, and those not very serious. *Eyes.*—Phlyctenular ophthalmia is not very common. *The teeth* are usually [142]

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

It has been stated by one or two casual visitors that the natives of Inishkea were dwarfed and very degenerate, but this idea seems to have arisen from the islands having been visited at a time when most of the able-bodied men were away at the lobster-fishery, and only the immature, the old, and the ailing were at home. No man of less than 1640 m.m. (5 ft. 4½ in.) was met with on either island, and the men appear to be robust and athletic, while the women are, on the whole, good looking.

The people themselves do not seem to ascribe any ill effects to the close intermarriage. It is doubtful if these unions are proportionally more frequent in Inishkea than on the mainland.

Diseases.—The following account is believed to be correct, though, as before stated, there was much difficulty in obtaining accurate information on this subject. Actual figures are given wherever they could be obtained.

The principal diseases may be classed as follows :—

Insanity.—A considerable number of cases occur in Erris, mainly in the mountainous districts, comparatively few in the Mullet, and, all informants agreed in stating, that there have been none for many years from either north or south Inishkea.

The prevalence of insanity in the mountainous regions may probably be partly due to illicit distillation, and the influences of worse food and inferior dwellings compared to those of the people of the coast.

Idiocy and Imbecility.—Repeated inquiries failed to find more than two imbeciles, one on south Inishkea, and the other in Belmullet. Two members of the family in the south Inishkea case are lame; no history could be obtained relative to the parents.

Epilepsy is not very common, but several cases (number not ascertained) are known; none of these are in the islands.

Deaf-mutism.—There is one case of deaf-mutism in Belmullet. Parents were said not to be related. No cases in the peninsula or on the islands.

Blindness, except among the aged, is not common. A congenitally blind boy was drowned in the year 1893, trying to cross in a curragh from one of the islands to the mainland with a cargo of poteen.

Malformations seem to be rare, two cases of hare lip were the only ones seen, and the inquiry failed to find any more except the two cases of lameness mentioned above.

Fevers.—Enteric and typhus are both common, cases of the latter being of frequent occurence. Measles and scarlet fever are not very often met with.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

population in the presence of strangers, to conform to the nativistic and primitivistic stereotype. Probably the most robust of the two dozen islanders past the age of 70 years believes that he will live to be 100 years old, because he continues to be active physically and doesn't "worry about the health;" he accuses his fellows of "worrying themselves into the grave" over matters of body and soul.

The etiology of mental illness as conceived by the islanders is varied and embraces both natural and spiritual realms. "Insanity" stigmatizes the victim and his family, often for many generations, no matter what its cause, and as many psychotics are treated at home—hidden from the probing eyes of strangers—as are incarcerated in the mental institution serving the region of which Inis Beag is a part. Statistics on mental disorders are hard to come by because of the opprobrium attached to insanity, but at least eight of the folk were institutionalized for various periods between 1940 and 1965. Only one of these is a woman and none were violent prior to admission. Inheritance, inbreeding, and the menopause are the natural causes most widely accepted by the islanders, but some claim that heavy blows to the head, acute alcoholism, and even prolonged emotional tension—or "nerves"—can induce insanity. In explaining why a former Inis Beag curate was committed to a mental institution, an old man revealed what is probably the most significant cause of mental illness in Ireland when he said that the constant association of the priest with a pretty housekeeper "drove him mad from frustration;" he advocated that only elderly, plain-appearing women (who will not "gab" everything that they know to "our man") be hired for the task.

Supernatural forces are believed capable of causing not only mental illness, but most other maladies and injuries as well. Pagan dispensers of ill health are vengeful or capricious fairies, ghosts, and witches of the evil eye, while Catholicism provides an unpredictable Devil, a deity who punishes sinful thoughts and deeds in this world as well as in the next, and priests who in Inis Beag often have interpreted the boundaries of sin according to Irish and personal criteria. In the case of certain folk stricken with mental disorders, I have heard specific causes put forth to account for their condition: parents who are second cousins, the evil eye of a neighbor, punishment by God for a particular misdeed, and a priest's curse. A man who mistreated his aged bachelor uncle before his recent death now is haunted with the specter of being struck down from the grave with sickness, injury, or madness by the shade of the uncle seeking revenge. His despair and erratic behavior arouse little sympathy from his fellows, who await the day of reckoning. The stigma of mental illness arises from its designation as inheritable or a sign of the deity's displeasure, both of which may doom those of generations to come. There is a strong suspicion among the folk that other maladies which are deforming or leave physical aftereffects once cured can be transmitted through inheritance. In this category are two mongoloids, one dwarf, one epileptic, one person with goiter, one with a cleft palate, and one who has recovered from poliomyelitis. These disabilities also can stigmatize a family.

Probably the most infamous custom associated with the Irish is their excessive intake of intoxicating drink, and certainly Inis Beag islanders are no exception to the stereotype. Men drink far more than women, but even though the latter widely condemn the practice many are known to send their children to the pubs